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Period Four
Mrs. Sanders
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The First Female Millionaire

Madame C.J. Walker

Imagine if you were the first African-American female millionaire in America. That was Sarah Breedlove, also known as Madam C.J. Walker. She was born in Delta, Louisiana on December 23, 1867. She made money by creating a very successful beauty and hair line for black women. The company name was Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company. One of her quotes was, " I had make my own living and my own opportunity. But I made it! Don't sit down and wait for the opportunities to come. Get up and make them."

After Sarah's husband, Moses, was murdered by a White lynch mob, Sarah and her daughter moved to St. Louis, Missouri. There she began working as a laundress and housecleaner. While working, she noticed her hair falling out. She had a dream where a man appeared to her and told what to mix for her hair. Some of the mix came from Africa, which made the mix special. Once she put it on her scalp, her hair started growing in a few weeks. After she shared her hair secret with some friends, it worked for them, too. Once she realized there

were no products for Black women's hair, she decided to make her own hair business for Black women.

After meeting with a fellow entrepreneur, Annie Malone, Sarah became an agent selling Annie's products. While working with Annie, she learned more about hair and hair products. Annie inspired her to start her own business. She changed her to Madam C.J. Walker, after her husband Charles Joseph Walker, to give her more professional reputation. Madam C.J. Walker started selling "Madam C.J. Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower," made from her own secret formula. Madam C.J. Walker slowly expanded her business traveling around the United States, Latin America, the Caribbean, and added a delivery service. Her daughter moved to Pittsburgh to manage the business in that area. By 1910, Sarah settled in Indianapolis, Indiana, a location that let her business grow. She thought that its location and access to transportation systems made it the perfect place for company headquarters, so she moved the offices there. She built a manufacturing plant in Indianapolis. She added training and hair research facilities. She hired more women to work at the company, desiring them to give themselves self-esteem, and giving a way to prove women can do more than you think.

In 1908, Sarah started Lelia College in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a school that trained women how to go door-to-door selling hair products. Two years later, she had more than 1,000 sales agent. Sarah hired Freeman Random to run the Indianapolis operation in 1913. Sarah opened a second Lelia College there. In 1914, the same lady who only had less than three dollars,

was worth more than a million dollars. She sold hair shampoos, hair conditioners, facial creams, and hot combs specially made for the hair of Black customers.

Sarah made a final move to New York, where she became heavily involved in Harlem society and the NAACP anti-lynching campaign. She contributed money to that campaign and traveled to the White House to discuss the passage of anti-lynching legislation. She also donated to the Tuskegee Institute and other African-American schools and began schools to teach her system of selling her company's products, allowing many African- American women to be independent businesswomen. Sarah turned agent-operators into Walker Clubs, helping them not just become successful in the hair care business but also in charity and community service. The first national convention of Walker agents was held in 1917, a year when the business was worth \$500,000. Walker hair care businesses allowed many women in the African American community to achieve economic success. Sarah built an 34 room mansion in New York City. She had more than 4 acres of land along the Hudson. She called this home "Villa Lewaro."

By 1917, Sarah was one of the best-known and wealthiest African Americans in the United States. Sarah died after suffering a heart attack on May 25, 1919. She left a large fortune, over a million dollars, giving two-thirds to groups like the NAACP, churches, and Bethune-Cookman College, and one third to her daughter. She was mourned throughout the Black community as a pioneer and a Black industrialist. For many women, White and Black, however, she had served as an inspiration and a role model. Today, She is remembered in Indianapolis at the Madame Walker Theatre.